



All Set For 2012?

If I were to give a list of key words for this issue, it would probably run as follows: *tennis, blogging, reflection* and *community*.

Stephen Brewer urges us to encourage our learners to delve into their inner self and find the necessary will to develop their language skills, not unlike a tennis coach preparing a player for Wimbledon. Phil Wade, along with a host of celeb-

rity ELT bloggers, advocates the blog as a means not only of linking up with like-minded and even not-so liked minded trainers, but also of maintaining a record of one's own professional development. Reflective practice – a skill we might all like to try and incorporate into our own teacher training and teaching programmes – has traditions in the social sciences. Dale Coulter sets about to present a series of models that he hopes will inspire us to adopt a more

reflective approach. Despite trying times for teachers in our field, or maybe because of it, a strong sense of community prevails. And like our newly re-elected President, Bethany Cagnol, I wonder if 'looking out for others' shouldn't become an automatic part of our mantra. So, are you all set for 2012? Your *Teaching Times* Editorial Team: Ros, Eric, Phil and Joseph, wish you all your most sustainable teaching year to date!!



Venez nombreux!!

au
'Spring Day'
à Strasbourg,

samedi, le 21 avril 2012

See the TESOL France website for details



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Teaching Pronunciation Efficiently Means Not Using 'Listen and Repeat'

Having spent way too much time asking my students to 'listen and repeat', I was intrigued by this talk by **Roslyn Young** that was so determined to give me an effective alternative.

Sound images fade in a few seconds. Motor skills last a lifetime. This is the key to teaching pronunciation.

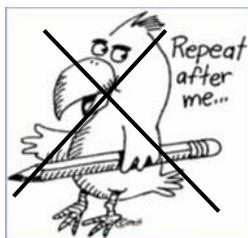
There is a widespread misconception in language teaching that if we want to teach students to pronounce, it is necessary to give them a model to copy. However doing this flies in the face of learning psychology. When you think about it, giving a model immediately draws the student's attention away from his articulators to his ears. But we all know we pronounce with our mouths, so when new sounds are being learnt this is where the student's attention has to be. Using 'listen and repeat' is setting ourselves up for failure. So never give your students a model!

But, what can one do instead?

Pronouncing a language is a motor skill. Since I want my students to develop this motor skill, I have to work in a way which I know will produce it. Whatever the skill being learnt, a motor skill is produced by doing, until one can do it. Think of skiing. You try it, keep working at it, become aware of things you have to change, and in the end you are able to ski. The more time you spend working to improve, the better you become. Learning to pronounce words is exactly the same.

In practice, I have a wall chart on which each sound in the language is represented by a coloured rectangle, a different colour per sound. (The IPA symbols could also be used, though less effectively.) The sounds/rectangles are organised in a way which helps students to learn them. For example, families of sounds are grouped together.

I point to a rectangle representing the sound I wish my students to learn and then give them a silent model by mouthing the sound. I encourage them to try it, and then I help them to hone in on the sound by giving them feedback on each of their attempts. My job is to inform them on their progress without ever actually saying the sound. I work like a coach. A coach doesn't show her runner how to run; she gives advice which the runner incorporates into his movements.



Since the students are doing something new with their articulators, they listen to their own production so as to hear what this new way of using themselves produces, and in this way and with my feedback they gradually reach the sound we are looking for.

From time to time, I ask a student to model the sound for the class: they see that someone doing something which is acceptable or getting close, and this encourages them to keep trying. Sometimes, the student who models can only say the sound once before losing it. No matter, the search goes on.

I am difficult to please during this exploration phase, since my aim is not for them to reach the correct sound quickly, but for them to keep exploring how one can make sounds. Their mouths have functioned automatically for almost the whole of their lives but they now need to become very aware of them again. As they do so, their work on the new sounds becomes more efficient.

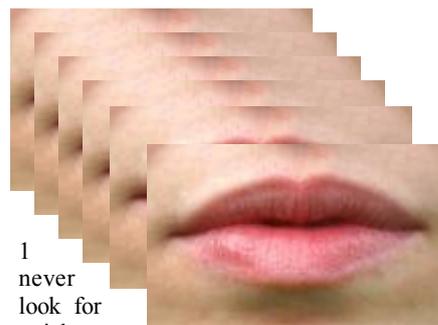
This way of working takes place in two phases:

Phase 1

Phase 1 is also Lesson 1 of all my language courses. It involves both gaining sensitivity to one's mouth and learning more or less how each sound is made. Obviously, students coming into English from languages with only five or six vowels take more time for this than those who already have most of the sounds of English when they start. I consider Phase 1 to be finished for any student when he knows where in his mouth to look for every new sound, even if some are still defective.

Phase 2

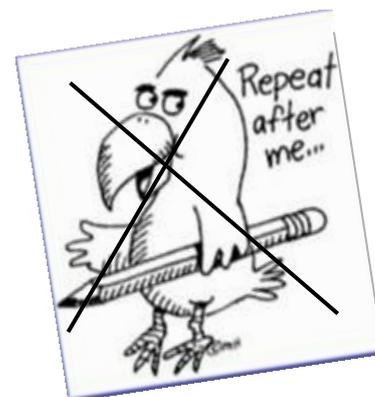
Phase 2 continues throughout the course, as we work on all the rest of the language. I listen to the students' productions, and every time a pronunciation problem comes up, I spend a few seconds in a micro-lesson making sure they work on it. If necessary, I can take a student back to the initial exercises to remind him what to do by pointing on the rectangle chart. Thus, the rest of the work of learning English gets done, but work on pronunciation never stops. The new sounds are incorporated into words and sentences as the course goes on.



I never look for quick results, because I want the students to keep working until they are aware enough of what they are doing with their mouths for it to be safe for them to automatise the pronunciation of the new language. This takes time and practice, so I give them pronunciation homework: I might ask them to go for a walk in the park and try all sorts of things, just to limber up their mouths.

Thus, students first learn to feel what they should be doing. Then they learn to say the new sounds in all contexts, and by the end of the course, their pronunciation is correct and fluent.

~ Roslyn Young



Roslyn, born in Australia, worked at the CLA in Besançon, teaching intensive courses until her retirement. Her main interest has been in quality and efficiency. She's published extensively on teaching and presented in conventions in France, Spain, the UK and Japan. She remains active in teacher training. Roslyn can be contacted on roslyn.young@wanadoo.fr